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By: Sgt. Edward Eagerton

Alaska Air National Guardsmen rescue four at Caswell Lake

CAMP DENALI, Alaska—Airmen with the Alaska Air National Guard's 210th and 212th Rescue Squadrons rescued three adults and one child who had broken through ice and become hypothermic while four-wheeling at Caswell Lake, north of Willow, Alaska, Nov. 11.

"The group had gone four-wheeling at Caswell Lake when they broke through ice," said Maj. Keenan Zerkel, a senior controller with the 11th Air Force Rescue Coordination Center, Alaska Air National Guard. "I don't know if they went into the creek or the lake, but they were cold and wet."

The 11th Air Force RCC was notified by the Alaska State Troopers at 1:10 a.m. when the AST determined that they were unable to transport the distressed group out of their location.

"The Alaska State Troopers sent two troopers on snowmachines to locate the group," said Zerkel. "When they arrived, they found the group to be near hypothermic. At that point, they couldn't get them out, and so they contacted us to support the mission."

The Alaska Air National Guard launched a HH-60 Pave Hawk helicopter from the 210th Rescue Squadron with a team of Guardian Angels from the 212th Rescue Squadron from Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson to support the rescue mission.

Using night vision, the rescue crew members navigated through the snowy night to Caswell Lake. Once on the scene, the Guardian Angels were lowered to the ground and hoisted the group one by one into the Pave Hawk.

"They were recovered using a hoist because they were in rough terrain," explained Zerkel. "Inside the helicopter, they provided the group with warm fluids, blankets and heat."

The group of four was then flown to Providence Alaska Medical Center and released to medical professionals at approximately 5:30 a.m.

"The crew members did a superb job," said Zerkel. "From being woken up in the middle of the night, to getting airborne so quickly, locating the distressed group in the dark and snowy conditions, and then bringing them back safely to the hospital, they are the definition of excellence."

The Alaska Air National Guard's 210th and 212th Rescue Squadrons were awarded four saves for this mission.

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